1: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1940
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

settled, in no way weakens this impression, because one well knows how among other African peoples cases are brought before courts under Government supervision which would not previously have been settled in a court, or even settled at all, and how for a long time after the institution of such Government tribunals they operate side by side with the old methods of justice.

Before discussing the chief characteristics of Nuer legal procedure I record that, according to verbal information, for I have never observed the procedure, one way of settling disputes is to use a leopard-skin chief as mediator. Thus, I was told that a man who has a cow stolen may ask a leopard-skin chief to go with him to request the return of the cow. The chief goes first, with several of the elders of his village, to the plaintiff's homestead, where he is given beer to drink. Later they go, with a deputation from the plaintiff's village, to the defendant's village, and here also the chief may be presented with some beer or a goat. The chief is considered to be neutral and a certain sanctity attaches to his person so that there is little likelihood of the deputation being injured. The visiting elders sit with elders of the defendant's village and the chief in one of the byres and talk about the matter in dispute. The owner of the animal gives his view and the man who has stolen it attempts to justify his action. Then the chief, and anybody else who wishes to do so, expresses an opinion on the question. When every one has had his say the chief and elders withdraw to discuss the matter among themselves and to agree upon the decision. The disputants accept the verdict of the chief and the elders and, later, the owner of the animal gives the chief a young steer or a ram unless he is a very poor man, when he gives him nothing.

If a man has a dispute with another of the same neighbourhood they may both go to the homestead of a local leopard-skin chief and lay their spears on the ground in his byre. A man would not plant his spear upright in a chief's byre, and I was told that were he to do so a bystander might appropriate it, as disrespect had thereby been shown to the chief. When both men have stated their views the chief and the elders discuss the matter outside the byre and re-enter it to acquaint the disputants of their decision. The person in whose favour the decision has been given hands his spear to the chief, who either gives it to a friend or spits on it and returns it to its owner. It was clear from the way in which my informants described the whole procedure that the chief gave his final decision as an opinion couched in persuasive language and

1: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1940
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

156 That every Nuer considers himself as good as his neighbour is
181 evident in their every movement. They strut about like lords of the earth, which, indeed, they consider themselves to be. There is no master and no servant in their society, but only equals who
[186] regard themselves as God's noblest creation. Their respect for one another contrasts with their contempt for all other peoples. Among themselves even the suspicion of an order riles a man and he either does not carry it out or he carries it out in a casual and dilatory manner that is more insulting than a refusal. When a
● [576] Nuer wants his fellows to do something he asks it as a favour to a kinsman, saying, 'Son of my mother, do so-and-so', or he includes himself in the command and says: 'Let us depart', 'Let the people return home', and so forth. In his daily relations with his fellows a man shows respect to his elders, to his 'fathers', and to certain persons of ritual status, within the circuit of its reference, so long as they do not infringe on his independence, but he will not submit to any authority which clashes with his own interests and he does not consider himself bound to obey any one. I was once discussing the Shilluk with a Nuer who had visited their country, and he remarked, 'They have one big chief, but we have not. This chief can send for a man and demand a cow or he can cut a man's throat. Whoever saw a Nuer do such a thing? What Nuer ever came when some one sent for him or paid any one a cow?'

181 I found Nuer pride an increasing source of amazement. It is as remarkable as their constant aloofness and reticence. I have
609 already described how Nuer would interrupt my inquiries. I mention here three incidents typical of the cavalier way in which they treated me. On one occasion I asked the way to a certain place and was deliberately deceived. I returned in chagrin to camp and asked the people why they had told me the wrong way. One of them replied, 'You are a foreigner, why should we tell you the right way? Even if a Nuer who was a stranger asked us the way we should say to him, "You continue straight along that path", but we would not tell him that the path forked. Why should we tell him? But you are now a member of our camp and you are kind to our children, so we will tell you the right way in future.'

576 In this same camp, at the end of my stay, when I was sick and being removed by steamer, I asked the people to carry my tent and belongings to the river's edge. They refused, and my servant, a Nuer youth, and I had to do it ourselves. When I asked him why the people were churlish, he replied, 'You told them to carry your belongings to the river. That is why they refused. If you had asked them, saying, "My mother's sons, assist me", they would not have refused.'

1: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1940
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

561

The age-set system is a further exemplification of the segmentary principle which we have seen to be so evident a quality of social structure. Tribes segment into sections and their sections further segment, so that any local group is a balanced relation between opposed segments. Clans segment into lineages and their lineages further segment, so that any lineage group is a balanced relation between opposed segments. Likewise the institution based on age is highly segmentary, being stratified into sets which are opposed groups, and these sets are further stratified into successive sections. We may therefore speak of structural distance in this new dimension. Just as the distance between political segments varies according to their positions in the political structure, and the distance between lineage segments varies according to their positions in the lineage structure, so the distance between age-set segments varies according to their positions in the age-set structure. The structural distance between any two sets is the social relation between those sets and the determinant of behaviour between their members.

The relativity of values which we noted in discussing the political and lineage systems may also be seen in the age-set system. We have noted that a set which is seen as an unsegmented whole by members of other sets is internally segmented, and that members of each of its segments see themselves as exclusive units in relation to the others, though these divisions close as the set becomes more senior and has a new position in relation to sets, since created, below it. Also, there is a tendency for members of two successive sets, adjacent segments of the structure, to fuse in relation to a third in feelings and in ceremonial actions. A *Rialmac* youth said: 'We and the *Lithgac* are about the same age and we can be free in speaking to them, but we must show respect to an older man, even if he is not of our fathers' age-set.' Although there are six sets with living members there are very few survivors of the two senior sets, and from the point of view of a young man they are merged with the one that follows them. Only four sets count, and, seen by individuals, they merge into two generation groups of equals and brothers, and seniors and fathers or juniors and sons. To a *Lithgac* son of a *Maker* father all members of the *Maker* age-set

[576]

1: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1940
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

561 another hospitality and to share their possessions. Fighting is
571 considered an appropriate mode of behaviour between age-mates, but a man ought not to fight a man of a senior set. The comradeship between age-mates springs from a recognition of a mystical union between them, linking their fortunes, which derives from an almost physical bond, analogous to that of true kinship, for they have shed their blood together. (4) Members
561 of a set are expected to show respect to members of senior sets,
576 and their deference to them can be seen in discussions, in
626 etiquette, in division of food, and so forth. Whenever there is a question about the propriety of speech or action it is judged by reference to the relative positions of the persons concerned in the age-set structure, if kinship status is not also involved. Since every man has a known age-relationship to every other man in Nuerland with whom he is likely to come into contact, their social attitude to him, and his social attitude to them, is determined in advance by the distances between them in age-set structure, unless kinship takes precedence. Although it is possible for a man to avenge a breach of these patterns of behaviour by a curse, if it is a very serious breach, the ordinary sanctions of conduct are a man's conscience and desire for approval.

561 It will have been noted that the relations between the sets
608 are defined in the idiom of family relationships. The members of a man's father's age-set are his 'fathers' and the members of his father's brothers' 'age-sets' are, in a less precise sense, also his 'fathers'. The sons of a man's set are his 'sons', and they may fall into several sets. The wives of members of a man's father's set are his 'mothers', and the wives of members of his sons' sets are his 'daughters'. All members of a man's own set are likewise 'brothers', though here the analogy is seldom expressed because the comradeship between age-mates is strongly affirmed in the idiom of the system, for they are all *ric*, age-mates, to one another. As, in any case, a man commonly addresses all persons much senior to himself as 'father' and 'mother', all persons much junior to himself as 'son' and 'daughter', and all persons of about the same age as himself as 'brother' and 'sister', the terminology of address between different sets is not a differentiating one and it cannot be said how

2;Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1951
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

a man would chant if there were no girls near, a Nuer replied: 'And if there were no girls near, what would he chant for?' A youth who wants a girl in marriage goes to her village or camp in the evening and chants there for an hour or two. He knows that she will understand that the poem is about herself. Her relatives know why he has come.

A youth is particularly careful not to be seen eating by unrelated girls: 'If he is not making love to them, he may do so some time or to one of their relatives.' When I asked whether it would matter if your sisters saw you eating, the reply was, 'Do you make love to your sisters?' Food must never be mentioned in the presence of girls, and a man will endure severe hunger rather than let them know that he has not eaten for a long time. It is a strict rule of Nuer society that the sexes, unless they are close kin, avoid each other in the matter of food. Nuer do not go near persons of the other sex when they are eating. A man may mention food but not sexual matters before kinswomen, and he may mention sexual matters but not food before unrelated girls.

Girls are the arbiters of decorum, and the severest sanction of a breach of good form is their disapproval. Not only is the shame of it a sanction for etiquette, but it is a powerful influence in making a youth generous, respectful to his elders, dutiful to his parents and kinsmen, hospitable to guests, industrious, and brave. The girls on their side are anxious to earn the good opinion of youths by correct behaviour in the home and in society.

It will have been observed that it rests entirely with a girl whether she accepts a man's attentions and how far he presses his advances. A girl who is fond of a youth wants him to marry her. If he is philandering she will, if she has any regard for her chastity, be frugal with her favours. The talk between a youth and his sweetheart is frequently the topic of marriage. He asks her whether she will marry him, and she says that she will if he has cattle and her parents consent; or he entreats her to allow intimacy, and she urges that she might become pregnant and he not marry her, and she would then be in trouble. However, if a girl is in love with a youth, and he has a winning manner, she may surrender to his pleading. Men often break the promises they make to girls when they want favours from them, and in looking for a wife a man may pass over all his sweethearts, past and present, and go with his friends to seek a spouse outside the circle of his usual acquaintances.

2:Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1951
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

ties between persons and of regulating the interrelations between these persons till such time as their relationships become assimilated to kinship patterns—broadly speaking its role in the kinship system—and its structural role in interlineage relations.

V

The parents and kin of a young wife scarcely acknowledge her husband's existence until a second child has been born to the union. If there is any need to refer to him they speak of him as *co*, the husband of, followed by his wife's name, and they speak of his village as his wife's village and of his children by reference to her name and not to his. It is also customary for the wife's people to give her children different personal names from those given them by their father's people, and if they address them by an honorific title they use that of their own clan and not that of the husband's clan.

Nevertheless, after the birth of the first child the marriage is held to have become a complete union. The husband has established a kinship tie with his wife's kin, who now address him as father of so-and-so, after the name of his eldest child. He is no longer merely the husband of their daughter. Instead of paying clandestine visits to the home of his parents-in-law (*ciengthu*) he may visit them openly, though he must continue to treat his in-laws, particularly his parents-in-law, with great respect, expressed in formal modes of address, which are reciprocal, and in other ways, most emphatically in the prohibitions on eating in their home and appearing naked before them.

Even before a young man has started to look for a bride he will not generally eat with much senior men, unless they are kin, because one of them might become his father-in-law. Once he has asked for a girl's hand in marriage he may in no circumstances eat in her home, and the prohibition continues, sometimes greatly to his discomfort, until two or three children have been born, when it is relaxed by a formal ceremony if the parties are on good terms with one another. The father-in-law prepares beer, kills a goat or sheep, and invites the son-in-law and his kin to his home to partake of a feast. He tells his son-in-law that there is no need for him to respect his parents-in-law any more. The son-in-law will refuse to eat, however, till compelled to do so by the insistence of his father-in-law's kin and by his father-in-law's gift of a cow, 'the

8:Howell E, G-5 (1942-1944)1954
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

586
587
which Mathot alleged had been killed by a lion while in his possession. Gac disputed this, and further claimed a cow from Mathot on the grounds that he had previously given Mathot two mosquito nets (value: 150 piastres). Court ruled that:

(i) Cow-calf had been killed by a wild animal while in Mathot's possession. He was therefore not responsible.

(ii) The mosquito nets were a gift outside the transaction of marriage, and were not reclaimable in any form.

Riak Deng v. *Gatbuok Nyak* (*Nuong Nuer Case*)

●[576]
Gatbuok married Riak's sister. In the first year of marriage Gatbuok was profoundly shocked because his wife urinated in his cattle-byre.[1] This nearly led to divorce, but the affair was patched up by Riak paying Gatbuok 40 piastres as compensation to 'ease his heart' (*pale loic*). With this money and some of his own, Gatbuok bought a cow which subsequently produced five calves. After five years the marriage was dissolved at Gatbuok's request. Riak then claimed the cow and five calves, which in his opinion were his legal right. Court ruled that Gatbuok had the right to retain only the original cow, while Riak should have the offspring. This ruling was given after considerable argument, and was an obvious compromise. The judgement was reversed on appeal on the grounds that the 40 piastres was paid as compensation for a definite offence committed by the woman, was not part of bridewealth, and was therefore not returnable in any form.

Gatkeg Luop v. *Tutdel Turuk* (*Jikany Nuer Appeal*)

Tutdel was court policeman under Chief Gatkeg Luop. Tutdel subsequently married Gatkeg's daughter, but divorced her. All cattle were returned to Tutdel, but Gatkeg claimed one cow previously given to Tutdel. Court ruled that the cow had been given to Tutdel as a gift in return for his official and personal services and was not affected by the marital relationship of the two. Gatkeg had no claim on the cow. This was confirmed on appeal.

Divorce of Widows living in Leviratic Union or 'Widow-Concubinage'

(see pp. 78, 81)

Generally speaking, the death of the husband precludes the possibility of dissolution of marriage. A Nuer court will not allow proceedings for a divorce to go through unless the husband is present to state his claims. This applies even when no children have been born of the union previous to the husband's decease or subsequently in leviratic union or 'widow-concubinage'.

Can Lony v. *Kolang Cal* (*Leik Nuer Appeal*)

Can's paternal uncle married Kolang's sister. The uncle then died, and Can took the woman to live with him. Can then claimed a divorce on grounds of the woman's barrenness. Appeal court upheld previous judgement that no dissolution was possible even though the woman had borne no children at all.

Riek Kwar v. *Latjor Kwon* (*Dok Nuer Appeal*)

Gatmac Kwar married Latjor's sister. Gatmac died, and Riek took over the woman in leviratic union. She then deserted him for another man. The

[1] A breach of good manners and a particularly reprehensible offence because it was done in the cattle-byre (*luak*), which is the exclusive stronghold of the male sex.

12:Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1930-1931) 1933
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

614 distantly related to them (*cike uth ko ji bothna okien*). Here they dwell as friends (*wane ngac kō rō*) and slowly forge new relationship by intermarriage (*ca mar mat e ken*).

609 I believe that there is another Nuer word which means the same
●576 as *rul*, namely, *yian*. Thus one speaks of strangers living in the village
621 of *diel* as *yiankien*, " their strangers dwelling in their midst." They are strangers because they have no hereditary status in the *wec* save through their mothers. Nevertheless *rul* and *yian* are objectionable terms by which to address strangers and would not be used without danger of strong words following. In speech they are assimilated to the dominant lineages and in this way the homogeneity and cohesion of the local group is asserted. One does not make a division between people who live with one, share one's cattle camp and village, help one in feuds, and quarter their herds in common pastures. Hence even if a man is a *rul* (or a *yian*) one does not make allusion to the fact in his presence. Still less does one make allusion to a man's Dinka or other non-Nuer parentage by calling him by the offensive term *jaang*. These strangers are accepted as equal members of the *wec*.

614 One of my informants, Jok, explained modes of Nuer aggregation
621 very clearly. No *dil* (or *tut*) dwells in a social milieu entirely composed of fellow *diel* (*gaat twot*), for the usual tendency is for *diel* to split up and for the segments to seek political autonomy on their own and found their own social conglomerate in which they will form the aristocratic nucleus. Hence a *wec* has its nucleus of *diel*, and around this nucleus are gathered a host of *rul*, who are often the husbands of daughters and sisters of *diel* who have not left the village of their fathers and brothers on their marriages but whose husbands have built their homesteads in their wives' localities. It is important to bear in mind that these girls cannot marry a *dil* or *tut* but are compelled by exogamous rules to marry into the classes of *rul* and *jaang*. Their children often grow up in the village of their maternal grandfather and his lineage are regarded as their kinsmen while their father's lineage are comparative strangers, and for this reason they tend to trace their descent through their mother rather than through their father and thus hitch on to the genealogical system of the *diel*.

614 Hence there is always a tendency towards fusion between two line-
619 ages who form part of the same tribal section. This is not simply due to the fact that there is often a real or mythological relationship between

14: Huffman M-5 (no date) 1931
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

291 chiefs. If he does wear a cloth, he wears it under one arm and knotted over the opposite shoulder. The Nuer appropriates any old cast-off clothing he may find. Sometimes grotesque effects are produced when he appears attired in his new wardrobe.

• 576 A man must never appear before his mother-in-law unless he is wearing some kind of a loin-cloth. It may be of skin (Fig. 1) or cloth, but he must have at least a one-piece suit on besides his beads.

291 A woman after marriage must always wear a loin-cloth of some description. And as she grows older, she usually wears a cloth or sheepskin over the upper part of her body, under one arm and fastened over the opposite shoulder.

The married woman's garb (Figs. 2 and 5) consists of a triangular piece of sheepskin worn over the pubic region, with a larger triangular piece of sheepskin at the back, the two pieces meeting at the waistline at each side but not overlapping to any extent. The lower point of each is longer and narrower than the upper points, terminating in a narrow strip about one or two inches wide. The piece that is worn in front usually has a border of beads sewed on it and may have a small bell hung on the end.

Sometimes a number of little thin strips of sheepskin about eight to ten inches long are fastened together and then worn in front in place of the triangular piece of sheepskin that is usually worn there.

The back part of this garb has a border of beads (from one and one-half to two inches wide) at the waist but not on the sides, unless the woman is quite old, and then she may if she wishes have a border of beads on the sides also.

[301] Bells, charms, shells, pendants of any kind, short pieces of cowtails, may be fastened at the waistline on the back part of the married woman's dress.

482 A Nuer girl, when quite young, begins to carry burdens such as water-jars on her head.

14: Huffman M-5 (no date) 1931
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

The next morning before she comes out of the house where she has spent the night, the sister of the bridegroom or some other woman relative comes in to bring her the married woman's garb, which they have prepared for her, and such ornaments as they wish to give her. At this time the beads are put in her ears. When she comes out of the house she is attired as a married woman, and from this time on she must wear some kind of a loin-cloth.

Her girl friends and herself are guests at a big feast at the village of her husband that day, at which there is plenty of food and drink in evidence. When the feast is over, the girls return to the home of the bride's mother, for the Nuer bride does not stay with her husband but returns to her mother's home and spends most of her time there for the first year or two of her married life, although her husband may come to see her at any time, or she may go to his village whenever he wishes her to do so.

CUSTOMS CONCERNING MARRIAGE

A wife never eats with her husband nor sees him eat. And he, while he knows she eats her food each day, never sees any sign of it. This custom is usually observed for two or three years. Then they may eat together. The wife usually stays with her mother until her child is a year or two old at least.

The wife must render a daughter's allegiance to her mother-in-law, while her husband, in turn, must help his wife's mother as she desires, hoeing her field, or cutting her dura, or whatever she asks of him.

He never appears before his mother-in-law without a loin-cloth on, and for some time must never come to see her without sending word in advance.

The oldest son is allowed to be married first, and the family unite in getting his cattle ready for him. Then he

14: Huffman M-5 (no date) 1931
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

NUER GREETINGS

● 576 The Nuer have a number of forms of greeting and are rather strict in observing their usage.

Probably the most common form is 'chi nienu', or 'have you slept well?' To this greeting, one responds with a grunt resembling an 'aw' sound. Then the second greeting is given. In response to this you again reply with a grunted 'aw'. Then you, in turn, ask your friend if he slept well, and he responds with the grunted 'aw'; you give the second greeting and he responds in like manner.

Two greetings are always given; the first one is always 'chi nienu', but the second one may vary; as—

chi palu	have you prayed?
chi tolu	have you smoke (in your village —the inference being that you have a fire and are cooking food)?
malu	are you well?

Any one of these three may be used as the secondary greeting.

When two people meet and have perhaps discussed some matter before greeting each other, they will use this first greeting before they part as well as the one used when leaving.

In parting, the one who is leaving says 'ku lo nien a gwaa' which practically means 'may you be well after I leave'; to this the responsive 'aw' is given. Those who are left behind reply with 'wir a gwaa' meaning approximately 'go in peace' which draws the responsive 'aw' again.

It is not a Nuer custom to shake hands with a person. The Nuer greeting is given by word of mouth. Nuer who shake hands with one are imitating their Arab or white brothers.

14: Huffman M-5 (no date) 1931
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

When a guest comes to a village he sits down. His host or hostess may place a sheepskin on the ground for him to sit on. He sits there, and presently his host and hostess greet him. 576

'Gwadin' and 'madin' are titles of respect given to men and women respectively when a younger person addresses an older one. An old woman, wishing to use a term of respect toward a young man may address him as 'wadin'.

A younger man may greet an older woman by taking her hands in his, spitting upon them and rubbing them. Then he bends his head and she spits on the top of his head. Or he may take her hands and blow upon them, and then incline his head while she spits upon it.

A father, returning from a journey, usually spits upon the heads of his children.

Girls who are nearing the marriageable age begin to use this method of greeting one another if they have not seen each other for some time; each in turn inclines the head while the other spits upon it.

In explanation of this method of greeting it might be said that the Nuer method of spitting when greeting any one is different from his method at other times. At the time of greeting he really sprays the head or hands, as the case may be, with a very fine spray of saliva.

15: Butt E-4 (No date) 1952 FJ22 Nuer FJ22

respected; it is the spiritual being, the *kwoth*, which the totem stands for, which is revered. The totems are symbols or manifestations of a spirit which can be in communion with men and beasts.(1) 776

Totem spirits are called *kuth piny* (earth spirits) a category which includes fetishes; this is in contrast to the much more important *kuth nhial*, sky spirits. Yet, although the two categories are thus distinguished, the Nuer maintain that they worship totemic spirits and that these spirits are with god in the sky. The totem seems to be the symbol of the spirit and the spirit to be an aspect of the spirit of the sky which is connected with the various lineages and is symbolised differently in each.

Kwoth

In addition to totemic spirits, *kwoth* also refers to 'god in the sky' and can mean any one of the sons of the sky god - the *kwoth dwonga*. Each sky spirit is associated with a certain aspect of nature; for example, Deng refers to the rain spirit. Another group of spirits are the *col wic* - the spirits of persons who have been killed by lightning and taken up to heaven. Persons supposed to have been taken into heaven by a whirlwind and those found dead in the bush without any apparent cause are also *col wic*. A *col wic* is considered to be a sacred spirit of his lineage - a *kwoth goal* - and most lineages have at least one of these spirits to whom cows are dedicated. Sometimes a *col wic* spirit enters into a member of his family or lineage and, when this happens, the man whom he possesses falls sick; on recovery, he makes a shrine in his homestead and becomes a prophet of Col (*guk cuol*), and the spirit of lightning contacts the people through him.(2) [791]

SACRIFICES

Sacrifices play an important part in all ritual practices, and are usually all of a similar nature. An animal is selected and is dedicated to a spirit by rubbing ashes along its back. An invocation is then made and the animal is killed by spearing it through the heart. It is cut in two halves when there is a cutting of social ties, and also at mortuary ceremonies when there is one half for the living and another for the dead. Sickness is the most frequent occasion for sacrifices. 782

THE CONCEPTS OF THEK AND NUER

Thek means 'to respect', and is used in various social contexts; for example, it denotes the behaviour expected of a man towards his parents-in-law; in blood feuds the kin of the slayer and of the slain may not eat from the utensils which the other party has used, and these are respected. In mortuary ceremonies a man's age-mates *thek* the meat which has been sacrificed in his honour. A man also pays respect to his totem. Failure to show respect where there is a *thek* relationship is thought to bring about misfortune.(3) Any serious sickness following the breach of a *thek* taboo is called *nuer*. 576 [758]

(1) Evans-Pritchard, *Annali Lateranensi*, 1949, Vol.XIII, p.247.
(2) Evans-Pritchard, *Man*, 1949, No.2, p.9.
(3) *Ibid.*, 1949, No.96, p.75.

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

I was told that in spite of these encouragements a youth who has lost his favourite ox has to be pressed to partake of its cooked flesh, his friends saying to him 'What? Are they not all the cattle of God? And if he has taken one of them you must not refuse its flesh. Why do you sit moping?' I have also heard it said that if the owner refuses its flesh and puts his spear away in the rafters of his byre, the spear may cut his hand or leg some later day because it was put away as though useless. In any case, in the end no Nuer can resist meat. A Nuer once told me wistfully that a man's eye and heart are mournful at the death of his beast but his teeth and stomach are glad. Nuer say that the stomach prays to God independently of the heart.

In taking things God, as we have noted, takes only what is his, but he is compassionate and, as we have also noted, spares a man if he sees that he is poor and miserable (*can*). In talking about these matters with Nuer I received the impression that, while of course they like to be rich, they think it safer for a man not to have too much good fortune. Pride in the number of his children or cattle may cause God to take them away. For this reason Nuer show great uneasiness if their good fortune is so much as mentioned. It is proper to praise a man's moral qualities, to say that he is brave, generous, or kind, but it is more than rude to remark on his physical well-being, the size of his family, or the number and quality of his beasts and other possessions, for evil consequences may follow. It is what Nuer generally call *yop*. Thus to say to a man, 'Well, you *are* fat', may make him thin; and it is the ambition of every Nuer to be fat, though I have never seen one who achieved it. It is also very bad to praise a cow, especially to remark on its exceptional milk yield, because it may then cease to give milk. I was told that 'only when her husband has married a wife with a cow will a woman praise it', that is, after it has ceased to be her cow. It is also most dangerous to tell a lad who has recently been initiated that the cuts on his forehead are healing well, or indeed to make any allusion to them, because a comment may result in an unhealed spot festering anew. I was often in trouble with Nuer on counts of this kind. I was always reprimanded if I counted children, saying, for instance, 'Let me see, so-and-so has four children, has he not? So-and-so, so-and-so, so-and-so, and so-and-so.' On one occasion I was eating porridge with Nuer and complimented my host on the size of the meal. Every-

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

one was most embarrassed and I was later taken aside by a Nuer friend and told that I must never make such comments. On another occasion I got into trouble for asking a man in jest, and, I admit, in bad taste, whether it was food or beer inside him, for his belly was as tight as a drum. I was told that my question might well make the man sick, and one of those present said that once a man had remarked to him, 'Well, you are full', and shortly afterwards he was violently sick. The worst offence is to praise a baby. In referring to it one should use some such expression as '*giakeme*', 'this bad thing'. When blessing children by spitting on them, which is the Nuer manner of showing favour to a child, kinsmen, and more especially kinswomen, utter some opprobrious remarks, sometimes a string of obscenities, over them.

The idea here is not that of the evil eye (*peth*), though the two ideas may in some ways resemble one another and also overlap.[1] In Nuer opinion the evil eye is an act of covetousness or envy, whereas here, I think, the emphasis is on the danger of rejoicing in unusual good fortune lest it should be taken away. There is a feeling that God evens things out, so that if he helps the needy he may take away from those with superfluity. As I understood their view it expresses a certain uneasiness at attention being drawn to possessions lest pride should bring about retribution. That this is their view is further suggested by a number of their stories which relate how God punished presumptuousness. I mention only one in this place, a short myth which reminds us of the story of Elijah and the priests of Baal and which is obviously either taken from some foreign people or is a fairly recent creation of Nuer imaginative thought, because it is about the *Turuk*, Turks, and their rifles. The word *Turuk* means in Nuer, as it does in the languages of many of the black peoples of the Southern Sudan, all lighter-skinned northerners with whom they have had dealings during the last hundred years, that is, Turks, Egyptians, Arabs, and Nubians of the Northern Sudan, and ourselves and other Europeans. The 'Turks' compared their rifles to God's thunder, and there was a trial of strength between them and God. God made a huge mud image of an elephant and told the 'Turks' to shoot at it, which they did to no effect. God then brought clouds and darkness and thunder and lightning and smashed the image

[1] *Yop* is presumably the same word as the Shilluk *ywop* which Wilhelm Hofmayr (*Die Schilluk*, 1925, p. 221) translates by '*böse Blick*'.

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

782 such as emphasize by their gravity that, particularly in relation to God, all are members one of another. It is of course natural as well as noticeable that close kin stick together in danger and when a wrong has been done to any one of them, but Nuer also quite clearly show that they feel that a misfortune for any member of their community is a misfortune for all, that when one suffers all suffer, and that if each is to be at peace all must be at peace. This feeling of oneness is particularly evident in Nuer prayers, because they are asking to be delivered from suffering, which has a common quality, the more so in that it is suffering in general rather than particular misfortunes of which they speak.

782 576 Perhaps the commonest phrase in Nuer prayers, and the one with which they often start prayer, is '*akonienko*'. Literally this means 'let us sleep', but here it should be rendered 'let us be at peace'. The commonest of the Nuer greetings and, when others are said, the first to be spoken is '*ci nien?*' or '*ci nienu?*', literally, 'have you slept?' The saluted man replies to this, as to other greetings, by a grunt of affirmation. This is something of a joke among Europeans because Nuer have a reputation with them for being lethargic and lazy; but the question means something rather different from 'have you slept?' It means even more than our 'did you sleep well?' What Nuer understand by the question is rather, I think, 'have you rested?' or 'are you at ease?' The sense of 'ease' is reinforced by the question which generally follows: '*male?*' or '*maleu?*', which can be translated 'are you well?' but is better translated in the same general sense as the first question as 'are you at ease?' or 'are you at peace?'—not, however, so much with the meaning of not being at strife with others as with that of being at peace within. The word *mal* is also used in farewells: '*wer ke mal*', 'go in peace', and '*dudhni ke mal*', 'remain in peace'. It has in the Nuer tongue the sense of 'easy' or 'light', and in other Nilotic tongues it means 'heaven' or 'above' and in its verbal form 'to pray'—images which go with sleep which eases the mind.

576 That Nuer regard being at ease or at peace as having something to do with being in friendship with God is shown by a further question which may follow: '*ci pal?*' or '*ci palu?*', 'have you prayed?' I think that the idea implied here is that being at peace in yourself means being at peace with God as well as with your fellow men. A fourth question asked in greetings is '*ci tol?*', the sense of which is: does the smoke rise from your hearth, that is,

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

is everything well with your home? A fifth question sometimes asked is *'ci bagh?'*, 'has it dawned (well for you)?' Not all these questions are always asked, but often two or three of them are, and sometimes more. In the full greeting we therefore get a composite picture of easy sleep and fresh awakening, contentment, prayer, and a smoking hearth, that is, of a person at peace in himself.

This digression was made to explain the meaning of the expression *'akonienko'* in prayer. The phrase is in harmony with some other expressions used in prayer: *'apwonyko pwol'*, 'may we be light', and *'apwonyko koc'*, 'may we be cool'. *Pwony* means 'body' or 'self' and here it means 'self' in the sense of the person as an entire person, body and soul. There is no reason why a Nuer should want to be light or cool in a purely physical sense. What is intended is to ask that the people may be light not only in the sense of physical well-being but also in the sense of *pwol loc*, of being light-hearted or joyful, free from burdens and troubles; and that they may be cool in the sense of not being anxious or worried, cool in the sense of calm. This is shown by a variant which is one of the commonest Nuer prayers, *'a yiegh neni koc'*, which can in this context only be translated 'may the souls of the people be cool', though in other contexts *yiegh* can mean 'breath' or 'life'. Very often the word *thei* is added, *'a yiegh neni koce thei'*, and this gives an emphasis: 'may the souls of the people be very cool'. Obviously Nuer are not asking, unless it be metaphorically, that their breath or life may be very cold. The word *koc* is also used in expressions of good will towards persons, especially in the blessing *'apwonydu koc'*, 'may you be cool', that is, 'may you be at peace'.[1]

The word *koc* can also mean 'soft' or 'tender', and though it is best translated 'cool' in prayers the two meanings may blend. Here again, Nuer clearly do not want to be physically soft. Indeed the expression *'koce thei'* in the physical sense of softness means when applied to men 'to be completely impotent sexually'. The idea of softness is seen in the metaphor often heard in prayers and invocations: 'may we tread on wild rice'. *Poon*, wild rice, is, Nuer say, the softest of grasses to the feet, as it is also one of the

[1] The symbolism can at once be appreciated by ourselves, especially by those acquainted with the Vulgate and other Latin sacred texts where *refrigerium*, a cooling, is used in the tropical senses of 'consolation', 'mitigation', 'refreshing', and 'comfort'.

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

196 576 264 Nuer use it for the attitude and behaviour expected of a man towards his wife's parents and to a lesser extent her other kinsmen also. He expresses his respect particularly by abstaining from eating in their homes and from appearing naked before them. A newly married woman respects her husband's people, especially his parents. She is circumspect in her relations with them, avoiding the parents as far as is practicable. Until her first child is born she may not eat in the home of her husband's parents—that is to say, in her husband's home. Newly wedded husbands and wives respect one another. In public each treats the other with marked reserve and they will not eat together, or even see each other eat or drink, till some time after their first child is born. Of the many European habits which are strange to Nuer the one I have heard them speak of with the greatest disapproval is that of a man eating [551] with his wife in public. Husband and wife also respect each other's name by avoiding its use. Sweethearts display similar behaviour. The respect a husband shows to his wife's parents and her respect for his parents is shared in varying degrees by the kin on both sides and for varying periods of time. I need not discuss details here. It may, however, be noted that avoidance with regard to food and drink between affines which is likely to have altogether lapsed, except in the case of the husband's avoidance of his wife's parents, and to have been relaxed even in his case with time and the birth of children, is demanded with extreme vigour should the wife bear twins. Then the paternal and maternal kin of the twins are for a short time in the position of parties to a blood-feud. They may not, under penalty of death (*nueer*), eat or drink or share a pipe together until sacrifices, the meat of which is divided between them, have been made.

196 583 784 There are also avoidances concerning bridewealth cattle which derive from these relationships of respect relating to marriage. A bride respects the *ghok lipe*, the cattle of her betrothal. These are the cattle her future husband hands over in earnest of his intention to marry her, and they count as the first payment of her bridewealth. She will not drink of their milk, lest she harm the cattle by doing so, till after the ritual consummation of the union, and possibly not even then, for I was also told by some Nuer that while she is still newly wedded and has not yet borne a child (*ciek ma kau*) she abstains from the milk of the cows her husband's people have paid for her. Likewise, even when a husband can drink milk

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

evident. They are intended to keep people apart from other people or from creatures or things, either altogether or in certain circumstances or with regard to certain matters, and this is what they achieve. Some of them have important secondary functions in the regulation of the social order—for example, those which determine behaviour between affines and between parties to feuds; but we need not now inquire why they concern certain persons, things, and situations and not others, nor what these persons, things, and situations have in common. We are concerned only with the fact that a violation of the prohibition is to a greater or lesser degree a fault which in many cases brings disaster to the transgressor.

Failure to show respect when there is a *thek* relationship is more than a breach of decorum. It entails to a greater or lesser extent religious sanctions. It is true that in some cases, as, for example, to be seen naked by a mother-in-law, the breach is chiefly regarded as one of good manners which, since the offence was at the worst one of negligence, can be made up for by presenting the offended person with some small gift. But even here a religious sanction is not entirely lacking, because it is believed that failure to respect the parents-in-law may injure the children, and this would ultimately be attributed to God. Nuer say that were a man's nakedness to be seen often by his wife's parents his children might go blind. However, it is not the sight of the genitals in itself which is thought to cause injury so much as the disrespect in not observing the convention. That this is so may be seen from the fact that though Nuer near the American mission at Nasser, Dr. Mary Smith tells me, now often wear shorts, they continue to wear as well and over them when they visit their parents-in-law the wild cat's fur traditionally worn on such occasions. We may surmise that the convention is felt by Nuer to have also a moral significance from the violent indignation I have witnessed in female relatives of wives at exposure by husbands in their presence although they were not their mothers-in-law and the exposures were entirely accidental. The violence of their complaints would have been out of proportion to the offence were it merely a matter of etiquette. To see inadvertently an unrelated person of the opposite sex eat, or accidentally to be seen eating by the same, is perhaps the lack of respect nearest to a simple, though serious, breach of manners, but Nuer nevertheless give the impression of believing that some misfortune may follow from it.